

It is unclear how many rural students are able to access international study opportunities, but the barriers for such students are fairly clear. Most rural students who study in rural secondary schools or colleges and universities often lack the same access to information as students in Ulaanbaatar, where most advising centers are located. These students usually lack family and friends who have gone abroad, particularly for educational purposes. English language penetration, as well as that of other foreign languages, is significantly lower in the countryside than in the capital and other major cities, even though English is now a required subject in the curriculum at all levels. The ability to pay for an international education is an issue as well.

#### SCHOLARSHIPS

One area in which the government and subsector can address many of these challenges is through scholarships. Currently, the government awards a small number of scholarships for foreign study at the undergraduate and graduate levels to students admitted to a top 100 institution listed in the *Times Higher Education* rankings. Relatively few students benefit from such a program, and most are likely from Ulaanbaatar or a few other major cities.

The Mongolian government may be able to send more students abroad by opening up more short-term opportunities. Similar to Brazil's Science Without Borders program, the government could fund students for one year of academic study, plus any necessary intensive language training and an internship. Graduate and postgraduate level programs could utilize existing partnerships that Mongolian institutions have with foreign universities.

Such a program can open up more access to study abroad opportunities, including to qualified students at rural institutions. By partnering with organizations in host countries that can help place students, students can go to a wider variety of institutions other than the most selective. Perhaps most importantly, by tying the study abroad opportunity to a domestic degree program, Mongolia can retain more internationally educated students.

#### MOVING FORWARD

There is clearly a need for more data collection and research on student mobility and the wider social and educational contexts in which such mobility takes place in Mongolia. Such information will help Mongolia better manage student mobility for the benefit of the higher education system and the country more broadly. Informed policy-making in this arena is important for Mongolia, to gain the most from its internationally educated citizens. ■

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## What Does Data Tell Us about Cross-border Online Learning?

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Distance learning, MOOCs, and blended and online delivery modes offer new ways to access education across borders without being physically present in the classroom, and have been heralded as potential game changers in transnational education (TNE). Given the attention it receives, what does data indicate about the size and scale of the market, particularly in countries that are host to, and source of, many international students? What evidence exists that students are increasingly turning to cross-border online education?

#### DATA FROM TOP HOST COUNTRIES

In the United States, host of the largest number of international students, the majority of universities offer at least some learning online: data from the WCET Distance Education Enrollment Report utilizing IPEDS data from fall 2014 shows that one in seven higher education students (14 percent) took all of their courses exclusively at a distance. More than one in four students (28 percent) enrolled in at least one of their courses at a distance.

Moreover, between fall 2012 and fall 2014—since federal data has been gathered—enrollments in exclusively distance education programs by students based outside the United States grew by 8.6 percent, drawing an increase of over 35,000 students in this time period. This outpaced domestic student online enrollments, which increased 7 percent by approximately 185,000 students during that time. Concurrently, total enrollments in higher education decreased 2 percent.

The growth in online enrollments, contrasted with the decrease in higher education enrollments, demonstrates that online education is becoming a more popular choice for students, though international students compose a very small portion of the total distance enrollments. Of 2,858,792 exclusively distance enrollments in 2014, only 1.3 percent (37,788 students) were based outside the United States. The rest were either domestic students (2,730,769) or enrolled from an unspecified location (90,235).

Cross-border online education is further understood in the context of the international student market in the United States. International student enrollments in the United

States grew 16 percent in the two-year period from 2012/13 to 2014/15, topping 854,639 students in 2014/15—a faster pace than the cross-border online learning market. While growth is evident, it does not appear that cross-border online learning is gaining outsized momentum when viewed as part of the greater international student higher education market in the United States.

Turning to the United Kingdom, the nation with the second highest number of international students, reveals a varied picture of the distance learning market. UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data shows that the number of UK-based distance learning students decreased from 210,005 in 2013/14 to 189,865 in 2014/15—a drop of 10 percent. As The Observatory reported in 2016, this decrease may be linked to the decline in part-time study, stemming from changes to student funding: in England, part-time enrollment in higher education has decreased 41 percent over the past five years, representing over 200,000 students no longer enrolled. The Open University, the largest provider of distance education, enrolls primarily part-time students, and has lost one third of its student body since 2009/10.

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According to the HESA definition, the number of distance learning students based wholly overseas, enrolled in UK programs, increased slightly from 119,700 in 2013/14 to 120,475 in 2014/15. This excludes the large number of students, sometimes dubbed “distance,” enrolled on the bachelor’s degree in accounting offered by Oxford Brookes University. This degree is offered in partnership with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), which automatically registers most of its members onto the degree program. This is seen to artificially inflate UK TNE figures.

The recent HE Global report on TNE found that 70 percent of UK TNE distance/online learning programs were first delivered before 2000, and only 4 percent of distance enrollments are in programs developed after 2010. This suggests that distance learning has not expanded much in recent years.

**TOP SOURCE COUNTRIES**

Is there evidence that online and distance learning is becoming an increasingly attractive study option in coun-

tries that have high outbound student mobility? The top two source countries for international students, India and China, are active markets for online and distance learning, though they do not publish data specifically on cross-border online learning. Both nations have seen large growth in distance learning, offering alternatives to face-to-face learning, including study abroad.

In India, there were more than 26.5 million enrollments in higher education in 2014/15, according to the University Grants Commission (UGC). Though UGC does not publish data on distance learning, other estimates and forecasts are bullish. Research firm TechNavio estimates there are 5.42 million distance-learning enrollments at all levels of education in India, with enrollments predicted to grow 10 percent by 2019. The online education market in India was valued at US\$20 billion in 2014, with revenue to grow 25 percent by 2019, and 100 of 140 e-learning companies in the country were founded in the past three years, indicating growth in the industry.

Growth in provision comes from all sectors, including national public universities such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), a distance learning university founded in 1985 that reports over 700,000 students. Foreign universities such as MIT and Harvard offer courses via platforms such as EdX—in fact, after the United States, India is second in the number of enrollments in EdX courses. While this indicates growth in online learning, it does not necessarily indicate that students are choosing distance learning instead of face-to-face options, whether from domestic or foreign providers.

China now has the largest higher education system in the world, with enrollments increasing sixfold in the last decade to over 33 million students. According to research firm Ambient Insight Group, by the end of 2014, 5.28 million students, or 16 percent of the total number of higher education students, were enrolled online.

Another estimate suggests that revenue from e-learning reached US\$5.8 billion in 2015 in China, accounting for 22 percent of all education spending in the nation. This data refers to e-learning at all levels of education; data specifically on online higher education is not gathered. In January 2014, the Chinese ministry of education suspended the rule that it must approve all online degree programs. While it remains illegal for foreign universities to offer online degrees in China, there were 68 domestic universities in the country with online learning institutes in 2014.

The Chinese government is actively promoting widening access to online education across the nation. In May 2015, President Xi Jinping called for “reform and innovation in education in line with development of information and communication technology to allow all people to access to education anytime, anywhere.” Despite these calls for

growth, China's April 2016 report on the quality of higher education—the first of its kind from the ministry of education—makes no mention of distance or online students.

#### THE NEED FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE DATA

In the United States and the United Kingdom, there is evidence of growth in cross-border higher education (CBHE) enrollments, though more comprehensive data would deepen understanding of where this growth is coming from. In India and China, the market for online education is booming, and though there is a lack of data pertaining specifically to CBHE enrollments, growth in the domestic sector suggests real demand.

However, it is premature to conclude that online is a drag on traditional international student mobility. Nonrecognition of foreign online degrees in China and India no doubt limits appeal. It may be through forms of blended education that online begins to play a stronger role in cross-border higher education. ■

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## Brazil's For-Profit Higher Education Dilemma

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**B**razil has the world's ninth largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with a population of around 195 million inhabitants, distributed in more than five thousand cities in 26 states and one federal district. The country has an unusual higher education system, with a relatively small number of public research universities and a large number of private institutions. Although the system has been growing rapidly in the last 15 years, the number of young people attending university still represents less than 20 percent of the 18–24-age cohort. Around 7.5 million students attend a higher education institution in Brazil. Seventy-five percent of these students are enrolled in private institutions and, perhaps even more significantly, approximately half of all private sector enrollees study at a for-profit institution.

Fifty years ago, higher education in Brazil, like in most regions of the world, was primarily public. Brazil's public universities are research oriented and remain tuition-free, but the expansion of the public sector has been severely limited by a combination of high costs and limited governmental resources. Since the 1970s, Brazilian policy makers have relied on the private sector to meet the burgeoning demand for higher education, facilitating institutional authorization and offering attractive fiscal incentives. The federal government further strengthened this policy in the late 1990s, when laws were changed to permit the creation of for-profit institutions. Educational entrepreneurs and investors rapidly created new for-profit establishments and changed the status of many older institutions from non-profit to for-profit. The University of Phoenix entered the Brazilian market in 2001, and although it withdrew from Brazil in 2006, its presence paved the way for the entry of other large, multinational entities. The shift to more for-profit institutions after 2005 was fueled by several other factors, including the expansion of the country's federal student loan program, the use of the Brazilian stock market to raise investment funds, and the introduction of a federal program whereby tax exemptions are given to private institutions that provide scholarships to poor students. The recent tightening of the for-profit sector regulation in the United States by the Obama administration also appears to have contributed to for-profit growth in Brazil, as some North American educational entities have moved their activities to foreign countries that offer a favorable legal environment.

#### CURRENT PRIVATE SECTOR TRENDS

Many countries do not permit for-profit higher education institutions. The expansion of for-profits in the United States has been extensively (and critically) documented, but the sector only accounts for about 10 percent of the total higher education enrollment in that country. For-profit higher education is also prevalent in China, but it focuses primarily on non-degree vocational education. Worldwide, where they exist, for-profit higher education establishments tend to be low status institutions that typically enroll “non-traditional” students who have been excluded from most public and non-profit establishments. Educational census data from Brazil reveals that compared with the higher education student body as a whole, for-profit enrollees tend to be older, are more likely to be employed, and come disproportionately from low-income families, with no prior educational studies at the tertiary level.

Today, Brazil is undergoing a period of deep economic crisis. One of the consequences has been a substantial reduction in the availability of federally subsidized student loans since 2015. As a result, many for-profit institutions